

Pastor's Column

What's so "good" about Good Friday

We might gloss over the implications on our way to Easter Sunday, the day we celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

Easter does seem to be a truly good day—The stone is rolled away, Jesus reveals himself to Mary, the disciples aren't crazy to believe in a rebel who dreamed of an upside-down kingdom where every-

one served each other, and death no longer has the sting once assured. We have been given proof of our victory over death because Jesus lives. If he hadn't lived, then there would be no proof, and Christians everywhere would have nothing to show for their faith. Easter's a great day.

Yet what happened on "Good" Friday? Well, in order for there to be a resurrection, there must necessarily be a death. Jesus died on Good Friday.

It wasn't just any death. Jesus was betrayed by his close friend, Judas, who appears to have stopped believing in Jesus' crazy dream. Betrayal in itself is brutal, but when it comes from a loved one, it stings all the worse. This is like a spouse going out, sleeping with someone else, and then coming home, acting like nothing's happened. They smile, kiss you on the cheek, say, "Hi, Honey, I'm home." Then the floor crumbles when you learn of their infidelity,

your guts collapsing into a neutron star. Though Jesus might have known Judas would betray him,

it's one thing to know it's inevitable and another thing entirely to experience it. The kiss on the cheek must have been like a white-hot poker to the heart.

Then Jesus was arrested, a

stressful enough situation in itself, as anyone handcuffed, frisked, and shoved into a patrol car understands. There were no patrol cars in Jesus' day, but there were soldiers, torches, and swords. Throw on top of that the inattentiveness of Jesus' friends (who fell asleep while the cops snuck up on them) and the cover of darkness (as the Pharisees refused to arrest Jesus in broad daylight), and the scene becomes extra cruel.

Private prayers were interrupted by the chaos of an arrest, Jesus accosted, his friends fleeing from him for fear of sharing his fate.

There's also the whole injustice of his trial. The Jewish Sanhedrin supplied false witnesses to come up with crimes that Jesus might have committed. The only way they could make something stick was by twisting Jesus' words to imply that he wished to destroy the temple of God, a blasphemous act

(Matthew 26:60-61 NKJV). Being falsely accused is a bitter thing. Neither Pilate nor Herod could find any crime he'd committed, and yet Jesus could see that death was coming whether he was innocent or not. Even the crowd who cheered for Jesus during his entry into Jerusalem now called for his crucifixion. He was humiliated, jeered at, spat upon, a man condemned. How painful it must have been to know of his own personal innocence while watching his life slipping away before him.

That's not even mentioning the physical abuse Jesus took. He was whipped, skin shredded off of his body. He was beaten, probably black-eyed and green-bruised. He was stabbed by thorns all around his head, tangling in his hair, blood dripping down his face. Nails punched through his muscles, crunched his bones. And then he hung, suffocating, while all of his loved ones—his own mother, even—looked on helplessly. Then, and only then, did he die.

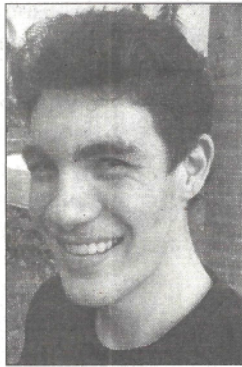
With all that in mind, Good Friday seems far from "good." It's a day honoring a horrible death. Still, there is goodness in it, tragic though it is. After all, Jesus didn't die for nothing, but as "a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28 NKJV). There was a rift between us and God, a failing on our part that prevented us from building a true relationship with our creator. We were like prisoners ourselves, rightly accused of our

crimes, without chance of bail or even much visitation rights. You could say we were being led to the electric chair, where we'd face judgement, alone, in torment, forever.

God stopped that fate. Jesus made a way. He took our place, so to speak. Through his death, Jesus opened a door for us to leave our prison behind. He made a way to bring us back to God, to bridge the gap between our failings and God's righteousness. We can build a true relationship with God. We can follow God and become reformed citizens of his kingdom, because Jesus suffered and died. His sacrifice was bloody, bitter, and cruel. But for us, it was good. Jesus loved us enough to die. It was the only way to save us, so he did what he had to do. Like celebrating a war hero or a doctor who cures the disease that kills him, we can celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. He deserves our praise.

And, thankfully, the story doesn't end there. Jesus took our place, sat in our electric chair, and died for his creation. But he didn't stay dead. Good Friday is Tragic Friday, Bitter Friday, Awful Friday, Necessary Friday; yet Sunday's on the horizon. As we live in this Easter season, let us remember how much God sacrificed for us. Let us remember how much Jesus had to suffer to redeem us. But let's also celebrate.

Jesus lives. So do we.



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How you can on your



BPT - Looking for a vacation that's not only fun, but also meaningful? Wish you had more time to volunteer in a way that really makes a difference? There's a simple solution: Plan your next vacation around a great volunteer opportunity.

Whether on your own or with the entire family, volunteering on vacation is a wonderful way to explore a favorite destination or someplace you've always wanted to go, while contributing to a cause you care about. It's also one of the fastest growing travel trends in 2019. According to a Google Consumer survey, one in four travelers report that they plan to volunteer on an upcoming trip, and almost half of travelers (47 percent) say they would choose a vacation destination based on a volunteer opportunity they are passionate about.

With the Travel for Good program from Travelocity, you can easily explore volunteer activities in popular vacation destinations across the U.S. Most activities require anywhere from just a few hours to a whole day.

Here are just a few of the opportunities you can find on their interactive volunteer map.

Concerned about hunger? Travel to New York City to volunteer with Rescuing Leftover Cuisine. This nonprofit organization saves food from New York City restaurants that would